



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

San Juan National Forest

Columbine Ranger District

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File Code: 1950/2300

Date: October 5, 2004

Dear Interested Party,

This letter is to inform you that the Columbine Ranger District of the San Juan Public Lands Center has revised both the Proposed Action and the Environmental Assessment (EA) concerning the Little Molas Lake Recreation Facilities Project. We are conducting a new comment period on the revised Proposed Action, which is summarized below.

NEW INFORMATION

Since the original proposal was withdrawn last fall (see Background section below), new information has surfaced that the Forest Service must consider in the EA, including:

- Original assumptions regarding what users (particularly current, local users) wanted at Little Molas Lake may not have been accurately captured by the Forest Service:
 - Differing uses (e.g. car camping and horse camping) occurring simultaneously at the site are not universally perceived as conflicts or safety issues;
 - Overwhelming support to “retain the natural condition” of the site was voiced;
 - Many users objected strongly to day use and/or other fees;
 - Opinions were mixed on the necessity for a winter snowmobile/summer horse trailer parking area near the turnoff to Little Molas;
- Additional hydrologic observations regarding the severity of impacts to the lake from on-site erosion and sedimentation have been documented;
- New direction on wildlife species analysis has been incorporated;
- Additional public input has been considered, including input from the Working Group reports, a recently conducted independent user study, and additional public scoping;

REVISED PURPOSE AND NEED

To best reflect all the information received to date, a revised Purpose and Need for the Little Molas Lake Recreation Facilities project has been adopted. Primary focus has been placed on resolving ecological resource issues that exist, and on retention (to the extent possible) of the natural character of the site.

The purpose of this proposal is to reduce the existing impacts to the soil, vegetation, and watershed at Little Molas Lake Recreation Site, and to prevent an expansion of the affected area, while providing an opportunity for a quality, minimally developed recreation experience.



REVISED PROPOSED ACTION

In order to accomplish the Purpose and Need, the Proposed Action now includes the following:

- Close and rehabilitate some areas where soil compaction and vegetative damage are occurring, such as redundant user-made trails, unneeded roads, vehicle-caused damage, and some de-vegetated camping areas. This will involve rehabilitating several acres of impacted land by scarification and seeding with a mix of native, certified weed-free seed, and/or by planting with native shrubs [26]. Other treatment methods could include the use of revegetation matting or mulch. Treat noxious weeds as necessary after rehabilitation.
- Correct other erosion problems along the roadways, trails, and shoreline through soil stabilization, planting and seeding projects.
- Restrict vehicle access to acceptable areas using mostly natural material barriers such as boulders and logs.
- Improve roads by grading, gravelling, and draining only at problem areas with resource damage or safety concerns.
- Install a gate at the intersection of the access road and the highway for optional closure to prevent road damage during seasonally soft conditions (late fall and early spring).
- Install an informational/educational sign and site map at the lake overlook area and trailhead, but limit other signing throughout the area to directional and other essential signage.
- Replace and re-locate the existing toilet with a minimum odor, barrier-free model.
- Install a second toilet near the trailhead, and possibly a third near the lake when funding becomes available.
- Do not designate or limit campsites.
- Construct a minimum of four handicapped accessible sites with a hardened surface (such as gravel), tables, fire grates, and access to the toilet.
- Provide several larger sites that are appropriate for horse camping.
- Provide walk-in tent camping area along the existing two-track road (which will be closed to vehicles and obliterated beyond the existing trailhead location).
- Install in-ground fire-rings only at heavily used campsites.
- Gravel around key use areas in heavily used campsites, but not in all areas.
- Increase parking at the trailhead location where the existing two-track road meets the Colorado Trail, and close the two-track beyond the trailhead to motorized vehicles.
- Reroute and reconstruct the road accesses to the trailhead and lake area to eliminate the safety concerns of negotiating the existing sharp corner.
- Better define the parking area at the lake.
- Provide Colorado Division Of Wildlife with truck access to the inlet area of the lake for fish stocking.
- Encourage and support volunteers to educate and inform site users of “Leave No Trace” practices, perform site stewardship, maintain an on-site presence, report resource violations, etc.
- Monitor resource conditions through such methods as photo points, vegetation surveys, water quality evaluations, and tracking of violations in order to determine if the Purpose and Need is being met.

BACKGROUND

Little Molas Lake is located between Durango and Silverton along US 550. The area is a popular area for fishing, picnicking, camping, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. It is also a popular trailhead for the Colorado Trail that is used by hikers, horses, and bicyclists. Resource damage such as soil compaction, erosion, and de-vegetation is occurring due primarily to unmanaged and uncontrolled recreation use.

In order to address these problems, the Forest Service has long contemplated project work at Little Molas Lake. During 2002 and 2003, the Columbine Ranger District conducted an analysis for a proposal to

rehabilitate the resource damage, to upgrade the campground, to implement camping and day use fees, and to separate differing uses to prevent conflicts. When the EA process was initiated, there appeared to be little public interest and few issues. Because of this, the Columbine Ranger District did not conduct extensive public scoping, and attempted to address the issues generated during scoping in an EA. During the comment period for this original EA, no comments were received until late in the afternoon of the last day of the comment period. A caller indicated there were many people who still wanted to submit comments. Therefore, the comment period was extended two weeks. In addition, a public field trip was conducted during the extended comment period. Again, we attempted to address issues generated from comments received, and the original decision was issued. However, an ensuing appeal, e-mail campaign, congressional inquiries, and petition drive indicated there were still unresolved issues. The Forest Service withdrew the original decision and re-commenced scoping. A sincere effort was made to reach all members of the public that had a stake in what might occur at Little Molas Lake.

We proceeded to hold two public meetings to receive public scoping input. Newspaper coverage of the process has been generous, and we continued to receive interest and input from a variety of sources.

Over the winter, the Fort Lewis College Office of Community Services hosted a series of professionally facilitated Working Group meetings for interested individuals to attend to better understand the issues and to provide input to the Columbine Ranger District on what should be done at Little Molas Lake. The Working Group consisted of individuals representing a variety of interests and viewpoints. Two products resulted from this effort: 1) The Office of Community Services transmitted a Final Report on their Working Group meetings, and 2) The Working Group itself transmitted their own Final Report to the Forest Service. Both documents included some very useful insight that has been considered.

COMMENT PERIOD

The revised pre-decisional EA is available for review on-line at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/projects/projects.shtml>.

Hard copies are available by calling the Columbine Ranger District at 970-884-2512.

Electronic copies can be obtained by sending an e-mail request to: **chooley@fs.fed.us**.

If you previously submitted input or comments and do not wish to have standing for appeal, you do **not** need to re-submit them. All previous input will still be considered.

Written, hand-delivered, facsimile, electronic, and oral comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the Durango Herald announcing the comment period for this project. The publication date in that newspaper is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Publication is anticipated for Oct. 15, 2004.

Written comments may be mailed to: *District Ranger, PO Box 439, Bayfield, CO 81122, Attn: Camela Hooley* or hand-delivered to the Columbine District Office at 367 Pearl Street in Bayfield. Comments may also be faxed to 970-884-2428, *Attn: Camela Hooley*.

Comments can be e-mailed to: **comments-rocky-mountain-san-juan-columbine@fs.fed.us**.

If comments are sent electronically, please submit them in plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Microsoft Word (.doc) format in a common font such as "Times". For electronically mailed comments the sender should normally receive an automated acknowledgement from the agency as a confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means (36 CFR 215.6 (4) (iii)).

Oral comments must be provided at the Columbine District office during normal business hours via telephone [970-884-2512] or in person.

Little Molas Lake 2nd Comment Period Letter

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information: (1) name and address; (2) title of the proposed action; (3) specific substantive comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision; (4) signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility; (5) for multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and (6) individual members of organizations must submit their own substantive comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215.

Thank you for your interest in Little Molas Lake.

Sincerely,

/s/ Pauline E. Ellis
PAULINE E. ELLIS
District Ranger, Field Office Manager

Enclosure: map

